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WASHINGTON, D.C. – The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) today released its [2011 Annual Report](#) and recommended that the Secretary of State name the following nations “countries of particular concern” or CPCs: Burma, China, Egypt, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Nigeria, North Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam.

For the first time, USCIRF recommended that Egypt be designated a CPC.

“CPCs are nations whose conduct marks them as the world’s worst religious freedom violators and human rights abusers,” said USCIRF Chair Leonard Leo. “In the case of Egypt, instances of severe religious freedom violations engaged in or tolerated by the government have increased dramatically since the release of last year’s report, with violence, including murder, escalating against Coptic Christians and other religious minorities. Since President Mubarak’s resignation from office in February, such violence continues unabated without the government’s bringing the perpetrators to justice. Consequently, USCIRF recommends CPC designation for Egypt.”

The 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) requires that the United States designate annually as CPCs countries whose governments have engaged in or tolerated systematic and egregious violations of the universal right to freedom of religion or belief. USCIRF’s Annual Report assesses conditions in these and other nations and provides policy prescriptions tailored to each CPC.

“The Obama administration continues to rely on the prior administration’s designations but hopefully will make new designations and apply meaningful actions very soon in order to underscore America’s resolve in bolstering the freedom of religion or belief around the world,” said Mr. Leo. “We also urge the newly confirmed Ambassador-at-Large for Religious Freedom to encourage relevant follow-up actions to protect religious freedom where it is most threatened.”

USCIRF also announced that the following countries are on its 2011 Watch List: Afghanistan, Belarus, Cuba, India, Indonesia, Laos, Russia, Somalia, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Venezuela. While not rising to the statutory level set forth in IRFA requiring CPC designation, Watch List countries require close monitoring due to the nature and extent of religious freedom violations engaged in or tolerated by their governments.

“Within the ranks of both CPCs and Watch List countries, impunity has become a matter of escalating alarm,” said Mr. Leo. “A number of countries are idly standing by in the face of violent attacks against religious minorities and even dissenting members of majority faiths, and this imperils religious freedom much the same way that direct state-sponsored repression does. This year’s Annual Report spotlights the problem and advances concrete solutions that will improve religious freedom while weaving it more tightly into the fabric of national security and U.S. foreign policy.”

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF’s principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress.

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